

PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee Bob Stump, Chairman

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STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN STUMP ON FISCAL YEAR 2003 DEFENSE BUDGET

“For the first time in more than two decades, our nation’s budget has been constructed around the number one priority of the federal government - providing for the national security of the United States. President Bush inherited a military that was characterized by the magnitude of its funding shortfalls; this budget will continue to make progress in turning the situation around.

“I am particularly encouraged that this budget continues our efforts to improve the quality of life for America’s service members by providing the second significant pay raise in as many years. It is also noteworthy that the President’s request continues to increase critical budgets for training, operations, and modernization. Such increases have the potential to make significant improvements to mission-critical areas in a short period of time.

“However, we must not lose sight of the fact that it will take many years to repair the damage done to our nation’s military by more than a decade of decline. For this reason, the President’s plan to further increase defense spending in each of the next several years is particularly welcoming.

“Unfortunately, I fear that much of this year’s requested \$48 billion defense budget increase will be consumed by ‘fact-of-life’ costs rather than improving the health of the force. Of the total increase, nearly \$20 billion is dedicated to the direct costs of waging war against terrorism, more than \$11 billion is applied to meeting increased health care costs and changes in federal retirement funding regulations, and nearly \$7 billion is necessary just to meet the annual costs of inflation.

“What is left over is not nearly enough to repair the damage done by decades of enormous maintenance, operations, and training shortfalls. It is not enough to support a complete modernization effort - as demonstrated by one of the smallest shipbuilding budgets in recent history. And it is not enough to support even a ‘flat’ military construction budget, making last year’s effort to enhance living and working conditions at military facilities a one-year ‘spike,’ rather than a sustained program of improvement.

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“That a \$48 billion budget increase is insufficient to meet such needs will surprise many people, but it clearly indicates the magnitude of the problems our military is facing today. Nursing America’s armed services back to proper health will require real increases to defense budgets of equal or larger magnitude in each of the next several years. I am pleased by the President’s long-term commitment to rebuilding the United States armed forces, and I continue to share in his vision of a stronger and more efficient military.”

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